

U.S. Department of Education
2012 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program
A Public School - 12PA15

School Type (Public Schools): ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
(Check all that apply, if any) Charter Title 1 Magnet Choice

Name of Principal: Mr. Michael Siggins

Official School Name: Spring-Ford Middle School -8th Grade Center

School Mailing Address: 700 Washington Street
 Royersford, PA 19468-2427

County: Montgomery State School Code Number*: 7818

Telephone: (610) 705-6002 E-mail: msigg@spring-ford.net

Fax: (610) 705-6255 Web site/URL: http://www.spring-ford.net

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I - Eligibility Certification), and certify that to the best of my knowledge all information is accurate.

_____ Date _____
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent*: Dr. David Goodin Superintendent e-mail: dgood@spring-ford.net

District Name: Spring-Ford Area School District District Phone: (610) 705-6000

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I - Eligibility Certification), and certify that to the best of my knowledge it is accurate.

_____ Date _____
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson: Mr. Thomas DiBello

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I - Eligibility Certification), and certify that to the best of my knowledge it is accurate.

_____ Date _____
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

**Non-Public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and emailed to Aba Kumi, Blue Ribbon Schools Project Manager (aba.kumi@ed.gov) or mailed by expedited mail or a courier mail service (such as Express Mail, FedEx or UPS) to Aba Kumi, Director, Blue Ribbon Schools Program, Office of Communications and Outreach, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Ave., SW, Room 5E103, Washington, DC 20202-8173.

PART I - ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

12PA15

The signatures on the first page of this application certify that each of the statements below concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) requirements is true and correct.

1. The school has some configuration that includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even K-12 schools, must apply as an entire school.)
2. The school has made adequate yearly progress each year for the past two years and has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
3. To meet final eligibility, the school must meet the state's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirement in the 2011-2012 school year. AYP must be certified by the state and all appeals resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum and a significant number of students in grades 7 and higher must take foreign language courses.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2006.
6. The nominated school has not received the Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 or 2011.
7. The nominated school or district is not refusing OCR access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
8. OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
9. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
10. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

12PA15

All data are the most recent year available.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district 8 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 (per district designation): 2 Middle/Junior high schools
1 High schools
0 K-12 schools
11 Total schools in district
2. District per-pupil expenditure: 15806

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

3. Category that best describes the area where the school is located: Suburban
4. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 5
5. Number of students as of October 1, 2011 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total			# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0		6	0	0	0
K	0	0	0		7	0	0	0
1	0	0	0		8	301	280	581
2	0	0	0		9	0	0	0
3	0	0	0		10	0	0	0
4	0	0	0		11	0	0	0
5	0	0	0		12	0	0	0
Total in Applying School:								581

6. Racial/ethnic composition of the school: 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
5 % Asian
6 % Black or African American
4 % Hispanic or Latino
0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
85 % White
0 % Two or more races
100 % Total

Only the seven standard categories should be used in reporting the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.

7. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2010-2011 school year: 2%

This rate is calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

(1)	Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2010 until the end of the school year.	3
(2)	Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2010 until the end of the school year.	9
(3)	Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)].	12
(4)	Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2010	582
(5)	Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4).	0.02
(6)	Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100.	2

8. Percent of English Language Learners in the school: 0%

Total number of ELL students in the school: 0

Number of non-English languages represented: 0

Specify non-English languages:

9. Percent of students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 14%

Total number of students who qualify: 82

If this method does not produce an accurate estimate of the percentage of students from low-income families, or the school does not participate in the free and reduced-priced school meals program, supply an accurate estimate and explain how the school calculated this estimate.

10. Percent of students receiving special education services: 19%

Total number of students served: 112

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional categories.

<u>7</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>19</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>72</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>11</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>1</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>1</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>1</u> Mental Retardation	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness
<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities	<u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed

11. Indicate number of full-time and part-time staff members in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff	
	<u>Full-Time</u>	<u>Part-Time</u>
Administrator(s)	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>
Classroom teachers	<u>40</u>	<u>0</u>
Resource teachers/specialists (e.g., reading specialist, media specialist, art/music, PE teachers, etc.)	<u>11</u>	<u>2</u>
Paraprofessionals	<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>
Support staff (e.g., school secretaries, custodians, cafeteria aides, etc.)	<u>7</u>	<u>5</u>
Total number	<u>65</u>	<u>7</u>

12. Average school student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the Full Time Equivalent of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1: 12:1

13. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

	2010-2011	2009-2010	2008-2009	2007-2008	2006-2007
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	%	%	%	%	%

14. **For schools ending in grade 12 (high schools):**

Show what the students who graduated in Spring 2011 are doing as of Fall 2011.

Graduating class size:	_____
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	_____ %
Enrolled in a community college	_____ %
Enrolled in vocational training	_____ %
Found employment	_____ %
Military service	_____ %
Other	_____ %
Total	_____ 0%

15. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award:

☒ No

☐ Yes

If yes, what was the year of the award?

The Spring-Ford Area School District is located approximately 20 miles northwest of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and 25 miles southeast of Reading, Pennsylvania. The school district encompasses a land area of roughly 44.40 square miles and currently educates approximately 7,700 students. The community offers the very best of suburban living, with a touch of small town atmosphere and a rural environment, while remaining in the direct sphere of influence of historic Philadelphia with all of the attractions and activities associated with a large metropolitan area less than an hour away.

The school district consists of seven elementary schools (K-4), one 5th/6th Grade Center, one 7th Grade Center, one 8th Grade Center, one 9th Grade Center, and one 10th-12th Grade Center. This interesting configuration for our secondary students offers many positives, but also requires them to effectively manage multiple transitions to different school buildings, professional staffs, and building cultures as they progress through these single-grade Centers. Therefore, much time is spent in developing transitional programs for students and parents to provide important information and ease any potential anxiety before the start of each new school year.

The primary mission assumed by the professional staff of the 8th Grade Center is to ensure that every student will be prepared for future academic and social success at the senior high school. What makes this mission challenging is that the annual starting point for this endeavor varies and cannot be consistently defined; “being prepared for 8th grade” is largely dependent upon the maturity, personal responsibility, and academic readiness that has been achieved in the previous school year. Regardless of the academic and social preparedness of the incoming students, the professional and support staff of the 8th Grade Center undertakes the challenge to best prepare those students for future success by establishing high academic and behavioral expectations, instilling personal academic responsibility, and reinforcing the characteristics of citizenship.

As the professional staff espouses high expectations for all students within the school, it is equally important that the staff assumes a high level of accountability for their individual and collective responsibilities as educators and role models. Educational research suggests that the quality of instruction received by students is the single most important factor associated with student performance. Subsequently, our teachers consistently seek to improve their instructional delivery and assessment practices through critical self-reflection and by working collaboratively with peers within their respective departments. Student performance data drives instructional decisions and is directly responsible for many of the improvements recognized within the school. Students are aware of the fact that their teachers are continuously monitoring their academic progress, enacting logical and thoughtful differentiated instructional opportunities, and/or additional remediation offerings that will improve their understanding and performance. Because of the commitment demonstrated by their teachers, students recognize the need to put forth their best effort and assume personal responsibility for their educational success.

Educational research also suggests that an additional factor contributing to increased student academic performance is the students’ perception and interpretation of the quality of their school’s culture. Students routinely observe teachers and building administrators working collegially within their classrooms as peer observers, co-teachers, drop-in visitors, and guest lecturers. By implementing our common reading and writing strategy across all content areas, a clear message has been sent to all of our students: *these skills are important to your current and future success, and even though I teach a different discipline, I am going to work with you to improve your reading and writing skills within my content area.* This powerful and unmistakable focus assures students that the professional staff regards their success as the primary mission and that they will all work together towards that end. Students also have the opportunity to observe the many positive, supportive, and humorous interactions of all staff members in hallways, during cafeteria duties, on the school’s televised morning show, and during the many extra-curricular

opportunities sponsored by the teachers. As our teachers model the characteristics of the school culture, students demonstrating these same traits are also recognized through our “Remarkable Ram” program, which was designed to highlight those students who have made significant changes that have increased their academic standing or performed random acts of kindness towards another. Finally, led by advisors and additional teacher volunteers, the National Junior Honor Society and Builder’s Club develop and implement multiple opportunities for community service projects that directly benefit the less fortunate or elderly within our community, further reinforcing their understanding of the importance of unselfishly giving to others.

The entire staff of the Spring-Ford 8th Grade Center is appreciative, humbled, and honored to have been nominated for National Blue Ribbon recognition. While student success and reaching our fullest potential as a professional teaching staff is the absolute motivating factor, being considered for such recognition reaffirms our beliefs, resolve, and commitment.

1. Assessment Results:

As defined by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, also known as PSSA, measures how well students have achieved in reading, mathematics, science, and writing according to Pennsylvania's world-class academic standards. By using these standards, educators, parents, and administrators can evaluate their students' strengths and weaknesses to increase students' achievement scores. According to the federal No Child Left Behind Act, students must be 100% proficient in mathematics and reading by the 2013-2014 school year. The PSSA defines two levels of non-proficient student performance on these assessments – Basic and Below Basic. The PSSA also defines two levels of proficient student performance on these assessments – Proficient and Advanced. The PSSA results allow schools and districts to evaluate their students' progress to make 100% proficiency a reality. The federal No Child Left Behind Act also requires states to determine whether schools and districts in Pennsylvania make Adequate Yearly Progress, also known as AYP. Performance and participation on the PSSA are among the components used to make AYP determinations.

The Pennsylvania performance targets (proficient and advanced) for the last five years are as follows:

2006 – 2007	Mathematics – 45%	Reading – 54%
2007 – 2008	Mathematics – 56%	Reading – 63%
2008 – 2009	Mathematics – 56%	Reading – 63%
2009 – 2010	Mathematics – 56%	Reading – 63%
2010 – 2011	Mathematics – 67%	Reading – 72%.

The Spring-Ford 8th Grade Center has not only met these targets over the past five years, but we have routinely scored in the top 5% of all eighth grade schools within our Commonwealth for each of the aforementioned assessments.

After the release of student performance results on our state assessments in the 2005-2006 school year, the Spring-Ford 8th Grade Center had earned the designation of School Improvement I status for its inability to meet AYP status for three consecutive years. Subsequently, minor changes were made to our academic program during 2006-2007, which improved student performance results to mandated levels and the school received a Making Progress designation. The 2007-2008 school year brought about a new building principal and the implementation of our School Improvement Team, which included one teacher from each of our departments and the building principal. The School Improvement Team and our professional staff began a challenging and highly rewarding journey to systematically define the root causes for poor student performance, conduct extensive research to determine solutions that would best meet the needs of our students, and enact such changes in a new and collaborative school culture that utilized student performance data to drive instructional improvements and decisions. Extensive changes were enacted that re-cultured our school by removing the barriers of teacher isolation, analyzing student performance data to influence instructional decisions, and increasing the accountability of all staff members regarding student academic success. Some of these important changes include the following:

- altering the master schedule to provide common departmental and interdisciplinary team planning time, and a student remediation period;

- establishing consistency within our academic departments through the use of common assessments and grading procedures;
- addressing reading and writing deficiencies by enacting common school-wide reading and writing strategies.

While these changes are substantial in scope, the successful implementation could not have occurred without the committed efforts and cooperative nature of our professional staff. As a result, the performance of all of our students, not just in mathematics and reading, but also in writing and science, has continued to rise to where we are consistently achieving in the top 5% in the aforementioned tested content areas within our Commonwealth.

A unique aspect of our building configuration in the Spring-Ford Area School District is recognized in the use of stand-alone, single-grade Centers for all of our students in grades 7, 8, and 9. Moreover, as students matriculate through these three grade levels, each student encounters the significant challenge to quickly transition and become accustomed to a new school building, culture, professional staff, and expectations for academic and social success. Therefore, as we review the trending of student performance data over the past five years within this distinctive configuration of single-grade Centers, the professional staff is quite proud of the performances of our students.

- The aggregate scores on the mathematics portion of the PSSA have shown a positive trend with 91% of students scoring Proficient or Advanced in the 2006-2007 school year, compared to 94% of students scoring Proficient or Advanced in the 2010-2011 school year. During this five year span, the school experienced a single drop in the aggregate mathematics score, as 88% of students scored Proficient or Advanced in the 2007-2008 school year. However, from the 2008-2009 school year to the present, aggregate mathematics scores have continued to increase.

The disaggregate score for the Economically Disadvantaged subgroup displayed the same trend as the aggregate score, with a single drop during the 2007-2008 school year, and a continual increase from the 2008-2009 school year to the present.

The disaggregate score for the Special Education subgroup displayed the same trend as the aggregate score, with a single drop during the 2007-2008 school year, and then a continual increase from the 2008-2009 school year to the present. Within this subgroup there does exist an achievement gap of more than 10 percentage points from the aggregate score. Subsequently, our general and special education teachers continue to review student performance data on benchmark and common mathematics assessments to determine areas of weakness within each student. These discoveries lead to differentiated learning and/or remedial opportunities for these students before they are reassessed. Some examples included: *Study Island*, *Compass Learning*, direct instruction, and standard-based materials.

- The aggregate scores on the reading portion of the PSSA have shown a positive trend as well, with 90% of students scoring Proficient or Advanced in the 2006-2007 school year, increasing annually with 97% of students scoring Proficient or Advanced in the 2010-2011 school year.

The disaggregate score for the Economically Disadvantaged subgroup displayed the same trend as the aggregate score for the duration of this five year period, improving from 81% Proficient or Advanced in the 2006-2007 school year to 89% Proficient or Advanced in the 2010-2011 school year.

The disaggregate score for the Special Education subgroup displayed the same trend as the aggregate score for the duration of this five year period, improving from 61% Proficient or Advanced in the 2006-2007 school year to 83% Proficient or Advanced in the 2010-2011 school

year. Within this subgroup there does exist an achievement gap of more than 10 percentage points from the aggregate score. As a result, our general and special education teachers continue to review student performance data on benchmark and common reading assessments to determine areas of weakness within each student. These discoveries lead to differentiated learning and/or remedial opportunities for these students before they are reassessed. Some examples included: *Study Island*, *Compass Learning*, *Read Naturally*, direct instruction, and standard-based materials.

After recognizing the positive trends related to student success observed on the mathematics and reading state assessments over the past five years, it is apparent that certain factors have contributed to these achievements. The changes in the master schedule have permitted teachers to work with students in remedial settings, develop common authentic assessments, collaboratively review student data with departmental peers, discuss best instructional practices with peers across all content areas, and improve their skill set within their professional craft.

2. Using Assessment Results:

Prior to the 2007-2008 school year, student assessment data was utilized in a limited role and was not incorporated into the process of determining the strengths and weaknesses of student performances on the state assessment, the strengths and weaknesses of the instructional performances of the school's teachers in delivering the required content of the state assessment, or the congruent alignment of the school's academic curriculum to state standards in reading and mathematics. Consequently, the leadership of the school overlooked the opportunity to analyze the valuable insights gleaned from student performance data when determining strengths, weaknesses, and potential solutions regarding curriculum and instructional practices.

Beginning in 2007-2008, and continuing to this day, on the first in-service day of each new school year, all teachers, regardless of their content area, are presented with an extensive document that contains the performances of their incoming students on the state assessment in mathematics and reading for grades 5, 6, and 7. These results are broken down by individual standards, thereby providing each teacher, in all content areas, the necessary insight to plan remedial assistance and differentiated instructional opportunities for the students assigned to their respective classes. It is the established school expectation that, beginning on the first student day of the school year, all teachers will know the strengths and weaknesses of their assigned students, and begin the process of addressing student weaknesses and building upon their existing strengths. Furthermore, all teachers receive a similar document that displays student performance results from the recently promoted eighth graders on the state assessments in mathematics, reading, science, and writing as an important opportunity for analysis and reflection regarding their most recent students' performances.

In addition to state assessment data, the school has administered periodic *4Sight* benchmark assessments to its students in mathematics and reading throughout the course of each school year. Student performance results obtained from these benchmark assessments are organized within a detailed document that is disseminated to the general education and special education teachers of mathematics and reading. During scheduled departmental meetings, student performance results are reviewed and analyzed, alterations to instructional activities are discussed and implemented, students are assigned to remedial groups which receive extra assistance during a remediation period, and teachers reflect and discuss best instructional practices. Results from these benchmark assessments are shared with the students; depending on their current performance, they may be required to participate in an additional benchmark test, or, if they earn a high proficient scaled score, they are given the choice to opt out of further benchmark testing or continue participating with the predetermined testing schedule. This procedure was implemented to increase students' level of self-awareness and internal responsibility for their current and future academic success. Consequently, it was very rewarding to observe our students' understanding of this lesson and demonstrate their commitment to improvement by continuing their participation with our benchmark testing instead of opting out.

The use of quarterly common departmental assessments also provides teachers with another important piece of evidence that is used to quantify and monitor student achievement. After administering a quarterly common assessment, the English, mathematics, reading, science, social studies, and world language departments meet to review and analyze student results. An important aspect of these meetings is realized as teachers critically examine the quality of the test construction, the depth of knowledge of test questions, and the current pacing of content exploration. Most significantly, department members engage in a collaborative conversation where they share instructional practices and the activities that produced the desired student performance results.

Without hesitation, the key to the consistently successful performance of this school can be inextricably linked to the widespread and now accepted use of student performance data by its teachers. This transformation has allowed teachers to effectively monitor the progress of students and has formed the basis for critical self-reflection and collaborative dialogue about best instructional practice.

Our school district recognizes the critical role that parents play in the education of their children. As such, our school has implemented many tools to effectively communicate with parents regarding the academic progress of their child. The use of electronic grade books provides parents with around-the-clock access to their child's academic progress within each class that they are enrolled. The school offers formal annual parent-teacher conferences, but also initiates and accommodates requests for parent-teacher conferences throughout the school year to foster the necessary collaboration to provide our students with the best educational experience. As students matriculate through our single-grade Centers, multiple evening parent orientation meetings are conducted at our Center to provide important information, tour the facility, and welcome families into the building's culture. Furthermore, our school board provides district families and the at-large community with significant and transparent access to our student achievement by issuing a monthly newsletter, televising monthly school board meetings (which include routine presentations about student achievement), and producing a number of television broadcasts about initiatives taking place within the school district. Any televised event is archived and available on our school district's website.

3. Sharing Lessons Learned:

The use of a common reading strategy across all content areas within our school has proven to be one of the most significant factors that has improved student performance, not only on our state reading assessment, but also within our school's content area courses. Subsequently, teachers from each of our different disciplines have had multiple opportunities to formally share the incorporation of our school's common reading strategy with members of similar disciplines at our senior high school. Initial conversations broadly defined general strengths, weaknesses, and formatting of the reading strategy, but soon focused on specific examples and effective applications. Peer observations also occurred, as senior high school teachers from disciplines other than language arts spent time within our school, watching and learning how they could effectively implement a reading strategy within their designated content areas.

Currently, our senior high school has instituted a School Improvement Team to address recent deficiencies identified on their eleventh grade state assessments. As they continue their work to make adjustments to their academic program, members of our eighth grade reading department have spent time with the high school teachers further discussing and exploring various reading strategies and providing insight as to how these strategies could be most effectively implemented within the various academic departments at the senior high school. Science teachers from our school are continuing to collaborate with the senior high school science department regarding the development of common assessments, use of *Performance Tracker*, and analyzing student performance data to drive decision-making. Finally, the senior high school has developed Academic Support classes to assist students who have not yet earned Proficient status on the state assessment in reading and mathematics. Members from our reading department have worked with the instructors of the senior high school Academic Support classes to construct and review the effectiveness of the curriculum being offered to the students who have struggled.

Lastly, the building principal is currently enrolled in a doctorate program and has had numerous opportunities to outline the many programmatic changes that have been made at the school over the past five years to building administrators of other school districts. These concentrated discussions center on creating a supportive school culture that is focused on assisting students in reaching their fullest academic and social potential, utilizing student performance data to drive instructional and programmatic decisions, and requiring the use of a common reading and writing strategy across all curricular areas. Student performance data has been shared to validate the effectiveness of these prescribed changes.

4. Engaging Families and Communities:

Our school is extremely fortunate to have the support of the entire community in our efforts to provide all children with a quality education. The primary strategy that we have utilized to ensure this family and community cooperation with our mission is through continuous and open communication. By consistently keeping parents and community members aware of what is occurring within our school, we understand that they will assume responsibility for their role in the education of their children to reinforce what is expected and collaboratively work with the school to resolve any issues.

Because our school board recognizes the importance of providing parents with information regarding the academic progress of their children, they have made the financial commitment to provide our school district with electronic hardware and software that enhances our ability to communicate with families. Each teacher is required to maintain a current electronic grade book where parents have real-time access to student grades. This grade book also performs the function of allowing teachers to send out mass e-mails to parents informing them of upcoming assessments, important announcements, and student progress. Our school district has adopted the use of School Fusion webpages for the entire district, including its individual schools and teachers. Daily homework assignments are published, and future assignments and/or assessments are recorded on individual student calendars, allowing parents to monitor current and future expectations of their children.

Given the degree of parental support and involvement within our schools, we routinely host informative orientation meetings for parents and guardians prior to the start of each new school year, an annual “Meet the Teacher Night,” annual formal parent-teacher conferences, a ninth grade course selection informational meeting, and an Algebra I informational meeting where course sequencing for secondary students in mathematics is explained. Most importantly, our community freely visits our schools to meet with individual teachers, guidance counselors, and building administrators.

1. Curriculum:

Pennsylvania's Academic Standards are the foundation for district-wide curriculum development. Teachers work in content-specific teams to utilize state standards and anchors to develop the appropriate course outlines and unit maps for each course. Curriculum is then created in a backward design model, using the Understanding by Design framework. Teachers identify the essential questions and enduring understandings to address the core ideas within the discipline and generate inquiry. All curriculum documents identify the content standards and learning objectives, including essential questions, content knowledge, and skills for each course. Through curriculum, assessments, and instructional practices, all courses are designed to address high levels of critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and literacy, as well as make cross-curricular connections. Students attending the Spring-Ford 8th Grade Center are enrolled in five major courses and several minor courses.

Major courses:

- English (Language Arts) includes an emphasis on exploring basic literary forms and provides opportunities for students to express themselves through a variety of written activities. Students interact with various genres, including novels, drama, and poetry. Writing instruction addresses narrative, informational/research, and persuasive writing through an emphasis on the writing process and domains of writing (focus, content, organization, style, and conventions).
- Mathematics courses provide three different levels of access for students, with two of these being accelerated. Geometry is offered to those students who have successfully completed Algebra I in seventh grade. Students who have demonstrated proficiency in Geometry during their eighth grade year will be permitted to enroll in Algebra II in ninth grade. Students entering eighth grade who have achieved the required performance standards are eligible to enroll in Algebra I. After successful completion of Algebra I in eighth grade, those students may enroll in Geometry in ninth grade. The remaining students will enroll in the Math 8 course, which is a pre-algebra course, and then enroll in Algebra I in ninth grade.
- Social Studies provides an introduction to geography as students explore the locations, environments, and economies of Africa, Asia, Australia, and Russia. Conceptual understanding is highlighted through an emphasis on global awareness, cultural competence, and current events.
- Physical Science is a broad introduction to physics and chemistry principles. Scientific thinking is integrated within each unit through interaction with the scientific method, communicating with quantitative and qualitative data, formulating conclusions that support collected data, and metric conversions. Unit topics include *Matter and Energy*, *Motion and Forces*, *Chemical Interactions*, and *Scientific Inquiry*.
- World Language offerings are French I and Spanish I. Students address linguistics and culture with the goal of being able to write and speak at an introductory level when they enter ninth grade so that they may enroll in French II, Spanish II, or German I.

Minor courses:

- Reading courses in eighth grade are offered as minor or major classes to provide acceleration or remediation through sustained reading experiences and study skill development. The department's goal is to prepare all students to be strategic, independent, and motivated readers,

writers, and learners. Through the use of thought-provoking material, teachers consider student interest and background to engage students in discussion and evaluation of various genres.

- Health/Physical Education focuses on the acquisition of beneficial health habits and the development of improved motor skills and physical coordination.
- Students are enrolled in one of the following four courses (Art, Music, Family Consumer Science, and Technology Education) each marking period as an opportunity to enhance their creativity and critical thinking skills.

Our curriculum supports the college and career readiness of our students through a variety of educational opportunities. The accelerated and high school equivalent course offerings in mathematics and world language provide students with the opportunities to enroll in Honors and Advanced Placement courses in the senior high school. Our school places a strong emphasis on improving adolescent literacy through our consistent and required use of reading and writing strategies across all content areas. Therefore, our students can readily explore challenging content-specific textbooks and manuals, as well as organize and present developed ideas in written form. Within our Family and Consumer Science curriculum, our students view a current video presentation about our local vocational school, the Western Montgomery Career and Technical Center, and utilize the *Bridges* website to determine a career clusters inventory that may guide their course selections when entering our high school in ninth grade. Finally, a representative from PHEAA, Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, has conducted annual assemblies for our student body by providing them and their families with important information about the process for planning for college enrollment and introducing them to the *Education Planner* website.

2. Reading/English:

Our reading curriculum provides two course offerings. The Reading Major course is offered to students who have previously demonstrated poor foundational reading skills, and is taken in lieu of either the French I or Spanish I World Language classes. The Reading Minor course is required of all students and focuses on developing skills and strategies to assist students to become lifelong readers. Therefore, the students who require the most assistance with the development of the important skills associated with reading comprehension will be assigned two instructional periods each day. From the 2006-2007 school year to the present, an average of 14% of the students have been enrolled in both courses.

Students enrolled in the Reading Major course are co-taught by a certified reading specialist and a special education teacher, with each offering a wealth of knowledge within their designated area of expertise. The reading curriculum incorporates the use of leveled and authentic novels to match the reading proficiencies of students and provides additional structure for remedial readers. Students are introduced to a variety of comprehension strategies such as bookmarks, double entry journals, DRTA, graphic organizers, marking the text, and plot diagrams.

Students enrolled in the Reading Minor course are introduced to the applicable real life reading skills of citing evidence, interpreting graphs, scanning, and skimming. Students are exposed to organizational and study skills recognized through developing flash cards, creating their own assessments, outlining, note-taking, and webbing. A technology-based book report and oral presentation using *PowerPoint*, *Inspiration*, or *Publisher* is a quarterly requirement of all students. Finally, students participate in a common quarterly benchmark assessment that is aligned with the designated state standards for reading.

Our reading department consistently monitors student progress through the use of benchmark assessments, common quarterly assessments, and *Study Island* to determine existing student weaknesses;

as a result, the department alters classroom instruction to provide effective remedial opportunities. Furthermore, individual members of our reading department identify and continuously meet with small groups of students throughout the school year to further develop reading comprehension skills in preparation for our state assessment.

The English curriculum, which is aligned with state reading, writing, speaking, and listening standards, provides all students with multiple opportunities to explore a variety of literary genres, as well as improve their writing skills throughout the course of the school year. The school offers a number of co-taught classes, where a certified English teacher is partnered with a special education teacher to maximize their professional talents and provide students with a challenging and rewarding experience as they develop their reading and writing skills. From the 2006-2007 school year to the present, an average of approximately 25% of the students are enrolled in a co-taught English course each year.

Students will be exposed to a variety of novels, poetry pieces, and works of drama. Over time, as the department has accumulated a variety of examples of each of the different genres, within their individual classes, students are assigned reading selections based upon their current reading level. Moreover, a tremendous commitment has been made by department members to properly plan instructional activities and prepare supplemental materials and assessments that will accommodate the variety of texts being explored at one time within a class. Students will use literary devices and elements to interpret and analyze the provided literary pieces. While the school's common reading strategy is continuously used, teachers provide students with additional alternative reading comprehension strategies to add to their respective "tool boxes" for future use.

As part of improving the literacy of all students, the department places a strong emphasis on developing the writing competency of students. They are routinely engaged in writing five-paragraph expository, persuasive, descriptive, and narrative essays that are assessed based on the state's writing domains rubric. Students are required to use organizational aides as a pre-writing activity, incorporate a variety of transition words and advanced vocabulary, and use the department-generated format of "five critical steps in the writing process" when completing any written assignment. Teacher-generated editing checklists are provided to allow students to self-assess their work, to engage in peer editing activities, and for teachers to meet individually with students to edit rough and final drafts. In the 2005-2006 school year, only 44% of the students scored Proficient or Advanced on the state writing assessment. In the 2010-2011 school year, 95% of the students scored Proficient or Advanced on the state writing assessment, and this improvement can be specifically attributed to the talents and willingness of these staff members to enact instructional changes that improved the quality of educational experiences that students received in their classrooms.

3. Mathematics:

The mathematics curriculum, which is aligned with state mathematics standards, provides all students with an immediate opportunity for differentiated instruction through three course offerings: Geometry, Algebra I, and Math 8. From the 2006-2007 school year to the present, an average of 15% of the students have enrolled in the Geometry course, 25% of the students have enrolled in the Algebra I course, and 60% of the students have enrolled in the Math 8 course. Students who are enrolled in the accelerated classes of Geometry and Algebra I must have achieved certain performance requirements during the previous school year to gain admittance into these courses.

Teachers in all mathematics classes utilize student performance data generated from common and benchmark assessments, *Compass Learning*, and *Study Island* to either remediate or enhance their instruction within individual classrooms. During their common daily departmental planning time, student results are reviewed and analyzed, and a plan for improvement initiated. Daily warm-up activities are implemented to specifically address the observed deficiencies in student performances within these varied instructional activities and/or assessments, while also serving as a valuable introduction to the lesson. In addition, our Math 8 curriculum offers a number of co-teaching sections, which provides students the

opportunity to receive more individualized and focused attention regarding performance deficiencies. The successful integration of technology into our mathematics classes in the form of smart boards and projectors, CPS (Classroom Performance System “clickers”), and various mathematics software and websites has afforded students the opportunity to explore challenging material in a different and motivating instructional medium. Finally, to further assist those students demonstrating difficulty with the variety of skills required of eighth graders in mathematics, support classes have been created within the master schedule, and teachers have volunteered their time to provide after-school remediation opportunities.

The mathematics teachers have embraced the concept of infusing reading and writing into their curriculum as a means to increase student comprehension of mathematics skills and algorithms, while additionally improving their overall literacy. Students are provided instruction on how to clearly articulate, through logical written expression and the appropriate use of content specific vocabulary, the appropriate problem-solving strategy used in real world situations. Students recognize that the effective expression of their ideas through written communication in a mathematics class represents true understanding and knowledge.

4. Additional Curriculum Area:

The Physical Science course is required of all students and has consistently proven to be the most academically demanding class that is provided. The variety of challenging and abstract concepts included in chemistry and physics affords students the opportunity to expand their critical thinking skills and make the necessary connections to real world applications. The strong commitment of the members of the science department to ensure student understanding has caused our Grade 8 PSSA Science scores to be the second-highest in the state during each of the past two school years.

The curriculum is aligned with the defined state science standards and the members of the department consistently utilize the SAS model to ensure the effective targeting of each stated learning standard. Students are consistently required to participate at the higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy by regular engagement in scientific inquiry, interpreting and analyzing data, and making predictions. To further stimulate increased levels of student understanding, teachers develop and utilize questions during instruction and assessments based on Webb’s Depth of Knowledge. Student answers must include the appropriate use of content-specific vocabulary. Student results from common assessments are reviewed and analyzed during departmental meetings. Conversations about best instructional practices or adaptations to current instructional delivery are deliberated. Finally, to accomplish the primary goal of assisting students in making the correct application of abstract concepts to real world situations, the following instructional strategies are implemented: daily lessons feature multiple examples, periodic group activities promote problem-solving and project-based activities, and the end of each unit of study includes culminating demonstrations which illustrate the interaction of the many different abstract concepts previously studied.

The school also provides a number of co-taught Physical Science classes, which partners a special education teacher with a science teacher. These teaching colleagues blend their specific skill sets and effectively utilize the process of Universal Design to provide appropriate modifications while maintaining high expectations for student performance within this content area. From the 2006-2007 school year to the present, an average of 20% of the students are enrolled in a co-taught science class.

The members of the science department volunteer additional time to assist their students reach their potentials by hosting after-school “science help desk” sessions, which are available to any student. Science teachers rotate as the leader of these sessions and provide support to students through content and/or assessment review and the consideration of important study skills. A science department website affords students the opportunity to download study guides, chapter notes, study tips, and links to additional websites for further exploration.

5. Instructional Methods:

While the school offers a wide array of differentiation through the modification or supplementation of classroom instruction and assessments, the expectation of high academic achievement for all students remains constant. Course offerings in our mathematics curriculum permit acceleration for our most prepared and precocious mathematics students. In each of the major subject areas, a number of co-taught sections are available to students that will afford them exemplary instruction from two teachers who have in-depth knowledge about a specific content area and the understanding of how, and when, to incorporate a variety of instructional strategies, modifications, and study skills to best meet the needs of all students. As a result, our curricular offerings provide immediate differentiated educational opportunities for students.

The Gifted support program offers enrichment opportunities for approximately 9% of the population who test into the program according to the guidelines established by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Students meet in small groups for individualized instruction relative to their identified strengths and needs. Programming occurs in place of the students' Reading Minor classes with the exception of key reading curricular activities, whereby cooperative instruction is delivered by a gifted support teacher and a certified reading specialist.

Within classrooms across all content areas, students are routinely engaged in the use of our common reading and writing strategies. As students mature and continue their education or explore a vocation, their ability to comprehend challenging content from their textbooks or manuals is critical. Consequently, the implementation of the common reading and writing strategies are this school's attempt to further the necessary literacy skills that will be required of them, not only in the eighth grade, but in the future as well.

Furthermore, individual classrooms consistently utilize cooperative group or single peer instructional activities and projects that introduce and reinforce respectful peer interactions, empathy toward others, individual responsibility, a sense of community, organizational and planning skills, and leadership. The development of these interpersonal and social skills are sometimes overlooked elsewhere, but are critically important to a student's academic success, as they will continue to work with a variety of teachers and peers throughout high school.

All of our classrooms have the ability to utilize technology to supplement or enhance the quality of instruction for students. Whether students are conducting on-line research for multi-media presentations or using *Study Island* as a medium to determine their academic progress with designated state benchmarks, teachers routinely incorporate technology into their instruction to best meet the needs and increase the academic performances of their students. Individual teacher and department websites are also a valuable resource which makes available important current information to parents and students while also providing additional links for remediation and enhancement opportunities.

6. Professional Development:

The primary belief of the building principal, which is supported by current educational research, is that the quality of instruction is the single most important factor in student achievement. Subsequently, many of the changes that were enacted during the initial year of the principal's tenure were designed to create a school culture where staff members had the time and support to accomplish the primary goal of the school by consistently improving the quality of their instruction.

By creating daily common departmental planning time within the master schedule, teachers had the opportunity to ensure that their existing curriculums were aligned to the respective academic standards outlined by the state. Furthermore, unit planning, daily pacing of instruction, and assessment construction could be conducted. In addition, teachers utilized this time to review student performance data obtained

from the variety of sources that have been previously discussed, and most importantly, engage in the critically important discussions about best instructional practices. While these conversations are professionally meaningful, teachers were encouraged to, and therefore, took advantage of, the opportunities to conduct peer observations within their departments, across other content areas within the school, and with other schools throughout the district. With each of these opportunities, teachers walked away with different perspectives and additional insights that could be used in critical self-reflection and later shared during department meetings. Throughout this school and the entire school district, there are a tremendous number of extremely talented teachers whose students consistently excel, and it was imperative that the journey of change and improvement began with observing and learning from them.

To ensure that the school achieves its goal of increasing student achievement through the improvement of instruction, a trusting and collaborative school culture must be established – as this undertaking cannot be successfully accomplished in isolation. Therefore, the building principal routinely works with various committees of teachers to address the need for formal and/or informal professional development opportunities. Decisions to attend local or state professional improvement opportunities, utilize on-site resources, or create the school's own professional development opportunity by using its own staff are thoroughly discussed and planned. It is through this collaborative work and the empowerment of all, that the goal of continuous improvement of instruction has become an accepted and expected responsibility of each staff member.

7. School Leadership:

At the conclusion of the 2006-2007 school year, a new building principal was named at the 8th Grade Center. His prior five years of experience as the Assistant Principal at the 8th Grade Center provided him with valuable background knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school's culture, curriculum, personnel, and master schedule.

The vision of the principal required the implementation of two critical components which have formed the long-standing and principled foundation of the school's function and mission regardless of any future educator possessing the title of instructional leader. The first component was the acknowledgement that the primary objective of the school was to provide the best educational opportunity for all students, and therefore each staff member accepts responsibility for the academic performance of their students. Secondly, a school culture must be created and maintained that is collaborative, trusting, and focused on student academic success through the continuous professional improvement of all staff members.

Initially, the principal enacted a number of important changes that supported the school's vision. The master schedule was changed to provide common departmental planning time for major content areas. Individual departments were required to institute common quarterly grading practices that solely emphasized student understanding of the content and the ability to perform the required skills that have been instructed within the classrooms. Departments were also required to create and administer common quarterly assessments that incorporated Webb's Depth of Knowledge within test question construction. Finally, as adolescent literacy was identified as a long-standing deficiency within state assessments, all teachers, regardless of their content area, were required to utilize the school's common reading and writing strategy on a monthly basis and submit formatted evidence to the building principal for review. These actions were clearly implemented for the purposes of providing teachers with the necessary time to analyze student performance data, discuss best instructional practices, and enact changes that would best meet the instructional needs of students.

To successfully execute the aforementioned changes, the principal created a School Improvement Team, which consisted of one member from each of the content areas to participate in discussions and debates regarding the merits and implementation of strategies. Because of their involvement within this collaborative decision-making group, a new contingent of building leaders had emerged. Their constructive and authentic participation instilled important feelings of empowerment, ownership, and trust

as they successfully communicated, modeled, and implemented these important changes with their peers. As the 8th Grade Center continually searches for improvements, new teams of teachers are engaged in this deliberative process with the building principal to collegially determine appropriate strategies. The greatest accomplishment of the building principal is seen through his recognition and belief in the skills, commitment, and dedication of the professional staff to always do what is right for their students.

PART VII - ASSESSMENT RESULTS

STATE CRITERION-REFERENCED TESTS

Subject: Mathematics

Grade: 8

Test: PSSA

Edition/Publication Year: 2011

Publisher: (DRC) Data Recognition Corp.

	2010-2011	2009-2010	2008-2009	2007-2008	2006-2007
Testing Month	Mar	Apr	Mar	Mar	Mar
SCHOOL SCORES					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	94	93	91	88	91
% Advanced	76	77	71	63	66
Number of students tested	611	578	605	576	505
Percent of total students tested	100	100	100	99	98
Number of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	0	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	0	0
SUBGROUP SCORES					
1. Free/Reduced-Price Meals/Socio-economic Disadvantaged Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	89	79	78	75	76
% Advanced	48	52	45	55	42
Number of students tested	64	66	64	51	41
2. African American Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	84	81	86	74	78
% Advanced	56	52	55	42	35
Number of students tested	25	21	29	31	23
3. Hispanic or Latino Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	100	64	100		
% Advanced	59	36	64		
Number of students tested	17	11	11	7	9
4. Special Education Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	76	71	58	52	57
% Advanced	24	31	22	19	18
Number of students tested	109	101	112	105	79
5. English Language Learner Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced					
% Advanced					
Number of students tested	1		2	2	1
6. Asian					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	100	100	96	100	96
% Advanced	90	96	89	78	92
Number of students tested	29	24	27	23	25
NOTES:					

12PA15

STATE CRITERION-REFERENCED TESTS

Subject: Reading

Grade: 8

Test: PSSA

Edition/Publication Year: 2011

Publisher: (DRC) Data Recognition Corp.

	2010-2011	2009-2010	2008-2009	2007-2008	2006-2007
Testing Month	Mar	Apr	Mar	Mar	Mar
SCHOOL SCORES					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	97	96	96	93	90
% Advanced	83	81	81	74	68
Number of students tested	611	578	604	578	502
Percent of total students tested	100	100	100	99	98
Number of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	0	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	0	0
SUBGROUP SCORES					
1. Free/Reduced-Price Meals/Socio-economic Disadvantaged Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	89	92	86	85	81
% Advanced	63	53	64	52	49
Number of students tested	64	66	64	52	41
2. African American Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	92	95	97	90	77
% Advanced	72	62	69	55	50
Number of students tested	25	21	29	31	22
3. Hispanic or Latino Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	94	91	100		
% Advanced	77	55	73		
Number of students tested	17	11	11	7	9
4. Special Education Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	83	83	78	68	61
% Advanced	40	38	38	29	20
Number of students tested	109	101	111	105	79
5. English Language Learner Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced					
% Advanced					
Number of students tested	1		2	2	1
6. Asian					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	100	100	100	96	96
% Advanced	93	96	89	78	84
Number of students tested	29	24	27	23	25
NOTES:					

12PA15

STATE CRITERION-REFERENCED TESTS

Subject: Mathematics Grade: Weighted Average

	2010-2011	2009-2010	2008-2009	2007-2008	2006-2007
Testing Month					
SCHOOL SCORES					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	94	93	91	88	91
% Advanced	76	77	71	63	66
Number of students tested	611	578	605	576	505
Percent of total students tested	100	100	100	99	98
Number of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	0	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	0	0
SUBGROUP SCORES					
1. Free/Reduced-Price Meals/Socio-economic Disadvantaged Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	89	79	78	75	76
% Advanced	48	52	45	55	42
Number of students tested	64	66	64	51	41
2. African American Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	84	81	86	74	78
% Advanced	56	52	55	42	35
Number of students tested	25	21	29	31	23
3. Hispanic or Latino Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	100	64	100		
% Advanced	59	36	64		
Number of students tested	17	11	11	7	9
4. Special Education Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	76	71	58	52	57
% Advanced	24	31	22	19	18
Number of students tested	109	101	112	105	79
5. English Language Learner Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced					
% Advanced					
Number of students tested	1	0	2	2	1
6.					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	100	100	96	100	96
% Advanced	90	96	89	78	92
Number of students tested	29	24	27	23	25
NOTES:					

12PA15

STATE CRITERION-REFERENCED TESTS

Subject: Reading

Grade: Weighted Average

	2010-2011	2009-2010	2008-2009	2007-2008	2006-2007
Testing Month					
SCHOOL SCORES					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	97	96	96	93	90
% Advanced	83	81	81	74	68
Number of students tested	611	578	604	578	502
Percent of total students tested	100	100	100	99	98
Number of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	0	0
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0	0	0	0	0
SUBGROUP SCORES					
1. Free/Reduced-Price Meals/Socio-economic Disadvantaged Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	89	92	86	85	81
% Advanced	63	53	64	52	49
Number of students tested	64	66	64	52	41
2. African American Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	92	95	97	90	77
% Advanced	72	62	69	55	50
Number of students tested	25	21	29	31	22
3. Hispanic or Latino Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	94	91	100		
% Advanced	77	55	73		
Number of students tested	17	11	11	7	9
4. Special Education Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	83	83	78	68	61
% Advanced	40	38	38	29	20
Number of students tested	109	101	111	105	79
5. English Language Learner Students					
% Proficient plus % Advanced					
% Advanced					
Number of students tested	1	0	2	2	1
6.					
% Proficient plus % Advanced	100	100	100	96	96
% Advanced	93	96	89	78	84
Number of students tested	29	24	27	23	25
NOTES:					

12PA15